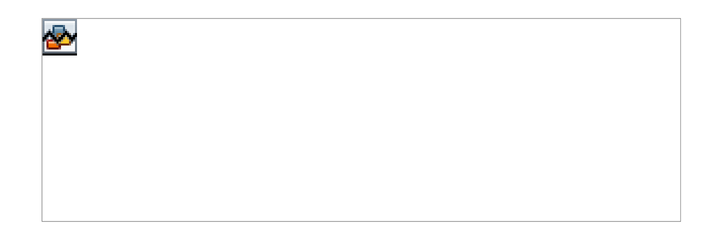


The Religion of Islam

Introduction

Islam is a religion based upon the surrender to God who is One. The very name of the religion, al-Islam in Arabic, means at once submission and peace, for it is in submitting to God's Will that human beings gain peace in their lives in this world and in the hereafter. The message of Islam concerns God, who in Arabic is called Allah, and it addresses itself to humanity's most profound nature. It concerns men and women as they were created by God--not as fallen beings. Islam therefore considers itself to be not an innovation but a reassertion of the universal truth of all revelation which is God's Oneness.

Prophets

This truth was asserted by the prophets of old and especially by Abraham, the father of monotheism. Islam reveres all of these prophets including not only Abraham, who is the father of the Arabs as well as of the Jews, but also Moses and Christ. The Prophet and Messenger of God, Muhammad--may peace and blessings be upon him, his family and his companions, was the last of this long line of prophets and Islam is the last religion until the Day of Judgement. It is the final expression of the Abrahamic tradition. One should in fact properly speak of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, for Islam shares with the other Abrahamic religions their sacred history, the basic ethical teachings contained in the Ten Commandments and above all, belief in the One God. And it renews and repeats the true beliefs of Jews and Christians whose scriptures are mentioned as divinely revealed books in Islam's own sacred book, the Quran.

Quran

For Muslims, or followers of Islam, the Quran is the actual Word of God revealed through the archangel Gabriel to the Prophet of Islam during the twenty-three-year period of his prophetic mission. It was revealed in the Arabic language as a sonoral revelation which the Prophet repeated to his companions. Arabic became therefore the language of Islam even for non-Arab Muslims. Under the direction of the Prophet, the verses and chapters were organized in the order known to Muslims to this day. There is only one text of the Quran accepted by all schools of Islamic thought and there are no variants.

The Quran is the central sacred reality of Islam. The sound of the Quran is the first and last sound that a Muslim hears in this life. As the direct Word of God and the embodiment of God's Will, the Quran is considered as the guide par excellence for the life of Muslims. It is the source of all Islamic doctrines and ethics. Both the intellectual aspects of Islam and Islamic Law have their source in the Quran. Perhaps there is no book revered by any human collectivity as much as the Quran is revered by Muslims. Essentially a religion of the book, Islam sees all authentic religions as being associated with a scripture. That is why Muslims call Christians and Jews the "people of the book".

Throughout all its chapters and verses, the Quran emphasizes the significance of knowledge and encourages Muslims to learn and to acquire knowledge not only of God's laws and religious injunctions, but also of the world of nature. The Quran refers, in a language rich in its varied terminology, to the importance of seeing, contemplating, and reasoning about the world of creation and its diverse phenomena. It places the gaining of knowledge as the highest religious activity, one that is most pleasing in God's eyes. That is why wherever the message of the Quran was accepted and understood, the quest for knowledge flourished.

Prophet of Islam

The Prophet of Islam is loved and revered by Muslims precisely because he was chosen by God to reveal His Word to mankind. The Prophet Muhammad is not considered to be divine but a human being. However, he is seen as the most perfect of human beings, shining like a jewel among stones. He was born in 570 A. D. in one of the most powerful tribes in the Arabia of that time, for it had guardianship over the Ka'bah in Makkah. An orphan brought up by his grandfather and later by his uncle, the young Muhammad displayed exceptional virtue as a trustworthy individual whom members of various tribes would invite to act as arbitrator in their disputes.

Early Years

At that time the Arabs followed a form of idolatry, each tribe keeping its own idols at the Ka'bah, the cubical structure built originally by Abraham to celebrate the glory of the One God. But the monotheistic message of Abraham had long become forgotten among the general population of the Arabian peninsula. The young Muhammad, however, was a believer in the One God all of his life and never participated in the idolatrous practices of his tribe.

Angel Gabriel

When forty years old, during one of the retreats which he made habitually in a cave on top of a mountain outside Makkah, Muhammad first saw the archangel Gabriel who revealed God's Word to him, the Quran, and announced that Muhammad is the messenger of God. For the next thirteen years he preached the Word of God to the Makkans, inviting them to abandon idolatry and accept the religion of Oneness. A few accepted his call but most Makkans, especially those of his own tribe, opposed him violently, seeing in the new religion a grave danger to their economic as well as social domination based upon their control of the Ka'bah. But the Prophet continued to call the people to Islam and gradually a larger number of men and women began to accept the faith and submit themselves to its teachings. As a result, persecution of Muslims increased until the Prophet was forced to send some of his companions to Abyssinia where they were protected by the Christian king.

Early days of Islam

The Makkan period was also one of intense spiritual experience for the Prophet and the noble companions who formed the nucleus of the new religious community which was soon to spread worldwide. It was during this period that God ordered the direction of prayers to be changed from Jerusalem to Makkah. To this day Jerusalem remains along with Makkah and Madinah one of the holiest cities of Islam.

Migration

In 622 A. D. the Prophet was ordered by God to migrate to Yathrib, a city north of Makkah. He followed the Divine Command and left with his followers for that city which henceforth was known as "The City of the Prophet" (Madinat al-nabi) or simply Madinah. This event was so momentous that the Islamic calendar begins with this migration (hijrah).

In Madinah, the Prophet established the first Islamic society which has served as the model for all later Islamic societies. Several battles took place against the invading Makkans which the Muslims won against great odds. Soon more tribes began to join Islam and within a few years most of Arabia had embraced the religion of Islam.

Victory at Makkah

After many trials and eventually successive victories, the Prophet retumed triumphantly to Makkah where the people embraced Islam at last. He forgave all his former enemies and marched to the Ka'bah, where he ordered his companion and cousin 'Ali to join him in destroying all the idols. The Prophet reconstituted the rite of pilgrimage as founded by Abraham. The Prophet then returned to Madinah and made another pilgrimage to Makkah. It was upon returning from this last pilgrimage that he delivered his farewell address. Soon he fell ill and after three days died in 632 A. D. in Madinah where he was buried in the chamber of his house next to the first mosque of Islam.

Sunnah (practices) of the Prophet

The practices and traditions (Sunnah) of the Prophet which includes his sayings (Hadith) became the guide for Muslims in the understanding of the Quran and the practice of their religion. The Quran itself asserts that God has chosen in the Prophet an example for Muslims to follow. Besides this emulation of the Prophet in all aspects of life and thought, his sayings were assembled by various scholars. Finally they were codified in books of Hadith where the authentic were separated from the spurious. The Sunnah has always remained, after the Quran, the second source of everything Islamic.

What is the Islamic Religion?

According to a famous saying of the Prophet Islam consists of five pillars which are as follows: affirmation of the faith (shahadah), that is, witnessing that La ilaha illa'Llah (There is no divinity but Allah) and Muhammadun rasul Allah (Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah); the five daily prayers (al-salat) which Muslims perform facing Makkah; fasting (al-sawm) from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan; making the pilgrimage to Makkah (al-hajj) at least once in a lifetime if one's financial and physical conditions permit it; and paying a 2 1/2% tax (al-zakat) on one's capital which is used for the needs of the community. Muslims are also commanded to exhort others to perform good acts and to abstain from evil. Ethics lies at the heart of Islamic teachings and all men and women are expected to act ethically towards each other at all times. As the Prophet has said, "None of you is a believer until you love for your brother what you love for yourself."

As for faith according to Islam (al-iman), it means having faith in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgment and God's determination of human destiny. It is important to understand that the definition of al-iman refers to books and prophets in the plural thus pointing directly to the universality of revelation and respect for other religions emphasized so much in the Quran. There is also the important concept, al-ihsan or virtue, which means to worship God as if one sees Him, knowing that even if one does not see Him, He sees us. It means to remember God at all times and marks the highest level of being a Muslim.

Islamic Law (al-Shari'ah)

Islam possesses a religious law called al-Shari'ah in Arabic which governs the life of Muslims and which Muslims consider to be the embodiment of the Will of God. The Shari'ah is contained in principle in the Quran as elaborated and complemented by the Sunnah. On the basis of these principles the schools of law which are followed by all Muslims to this day were developed early in Islamic history. This Law, while being rooted in the sources of the Islamic revelation, is a living body of law which caters to the needs of Islamic society .

Islamic laws are essentially preventative and are not based on harsh punishment except as a last measure. The faith of the Muslim causes him to have respect for the rights of others and Islamic Law is such that it prevents transgression from taking place in most instances. That is why what people consider to be harsh punishments are so rarely in need of being applied.

The Spread of Islam

From the oasis cities of Makkah and Madinah in the Arabian desert, the message of Islam went forth with electrifying speed. Within half a century of the Prophet's death, Islam had spread to three continents. Islam is not, as some imagine in the West, a religion of the sword nor did it spread primarily by means of war. It was only within Arabia, where a crude form of idolatry was rampant, that Islam was propagated by warring against those tribes which did not accept the message of God--whereas Christians and Jews were not forced to convert. Outside of Arabia also the vast lands conquered by the Arab armies in a short period became Muslim not by force of the sword but by the appeal of the new religion. It was faith in One God and emphasis upon His Mercy that brought vast numbers of people into the fold of Islam. The new religion did not coerce people to convert. Many continued to remain Jews and Christians and to this day important communities of the followers of these faiths are found in Muslim lands.

Moreover, the spread of Islam was not limited to its miraculous early expansion outside of Arabia. During later centuries the Turks embraced Islam peacefully as did a large number of

the people of the Indian subcontinent and the Malay-speaking world. In Africa also, Islam has spread during the past two centuries even under the mighty power of European colonial rulers. Today Islam continues to grow not only in Africa but also in Europe and America where Muslims now comprise a notable minority.

Islam A World Civilization

General Characteristics of Islamic Civilization

Islam was destined to become a world religion and to create a civilization which stretched from one end of the globe to the other. Already during the early Muslim caliphates, first the Arabs, then the Persians and later the Turks set about to create classical Islamic civilization. Later, in the 13th century, both Africa and India became great centers of Islamic civilization and soon thereafter Muslim kingdoms were established in the Malay-Indonesian world while Chinese Muslims flourished throughout China.

Global religion

Islam is a religion for all people from whatever race or background they might be. That is why Islamic civilization is based on a unity which stands completely against any racial or ethnic discrimination. Such major racial and ethnic groups as the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Africans, Indians, Chinese and Malays in addition to numerous smaller units embraced Islam and contributed to the building of Islamic civilization. Moreover, Islam was not opposed to learning from the earlier civilizations and incorporating their science, learning, and culture into its own world view, as long as they did not oppose the principles of Islam. Each ethnic and racial group which embraced Islam made its contribution to the one Islamic civilization to which everyone belonged. The sense of brotherhood and sisterhood was so much emphasized that it overcame all local attachments to a particular tribe, race, or language--all of which became subservient to the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of Islam.

The global civilization thus created by Islam permitted people of diverse ethnic backgrounds to work together in cultivating various arts and sciences. Although the civilization was profoundly Islamic, even non-Muslim "people of the book" participated in the intellectual activity whose fruits belonged to everyone. The scientific climate was reminiscent of the present situation in America where scientists and men and women of learning from all over the world are active in the advancement of knowledge which belongs to everyone.

The global civilization created by Islam also succeeded in activating the mind and thought of the people who entered its fold. As a result of Islam, the nomadic Arabs became torch-bearers of science and learning. The Persians who had created a great civilization before the rise of Islam nevertheless produced much more science and learning in the Islamic period than before. The same can be said of the Turks and other peoples who embraced Islam. The religion of Islam was itself responsible not only for the creation of a world civilization in which people of many different ethnic backgrounds participated, but it played a central role in developing intellectual and cultural life on a scale not seen before. For some eight hundred years Arabic remained the major intellectual and scientific language of the world. During the centuries following the rise of Islam, Muslim dynasties ruling in various parts of the Islamic world bore witness to the flowering of Islamic culture and thought. In fact this tradition of intellectual activity was eclipsed only at the beginning of modern times as a result of the weakening of faith among Muslims combined with external domination. And today this activity has begun anew in many parts of the Islamic world now that the Muslims have regained their political independence.

A Brief History of Islam: The Rightly Guided Caliphs

Upon the death of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, the friend of the Prophet and the first adult male to embrace Islam, became caliph. Abu Bakr ruled for two years to be succeeded by 'Umar who was caliph for a decade and during whose rule Islam spread extensively east and west

conquering the Persian empire, Syria and Egypt. It was 'Umar who marched on foot at the end of the Muslim army into Jerusalem and ordered the protection of Christian sites. 'Umar also established the first public treasury and a sophisticated financial administration. He established many of the basic practices of Islamic government.

'Umar was succeeded by 'Uthman who ruled for some twelve years during which time the Islamic expansion continued. He is also known as the caliph who had the definitive text of the Noble Quran copied and sent to the four corners of the Islamic world. He was in turn succeeded by 'Ali who is known to this day for his eloquent sermons and letters, and also for his bravery. With his death the rule of the "rightly guided" caliphs, who hold a special place of respect in the hearts of Muslims, came to an end.

The Caliphates

Umayyad

The Umayyad caliphate established in 661 was to last for about a century. During this time Damascus became the capital of an Islamic world which stretched from the western borders of China to southern France. Not only did the Islamic conquests continue during this period through North Africa to Spain and France in the West and to Sind, Central Asia and Transoxiana in the East, but the basic social and legal institutions of the newly founded Islamic world were established.

Abbasids

The Abbasids, who succeeded the Umayyads, shifted the capital to Baghdad which soon developed into an incomparable center of learning and culture as well as the administrative and political heart of a vast world.

They ruled for over 500 years but gradually their power waned and they remained only symbolic rulers bestowing legitimacy upon various sultans and princes who wielded actual military power. The Abbasid caliphate was finally abolished when Hulagu, the Mongol ruler, captured Baghdad in 1258, destroying much of the city including its incomparable libraries. While the Abbasids ruled in Baghdad, a number of powerful dynasties such as the Fatimids, Ayyubids and Mamluks held power in Egypt, Syria and Palestine. The most important event in this area as far as the relation between Islam and the Western world was concerned was the series of Crusades declared by the Pope and espoused by various European kings. The purpose, although political, was outwardly to recapture the Holy Land and especially Jerusalem for Christianity. Although there was at the beginning some success and local European rule was set up in parts of Syria and Palestine, Muslims finally prevailed and in 1187 Saladin, the great Muslim leader, recaptured Jerusalem and defeated the Crusaders.

North Africa and Spain

When the Abbasids captured Damascus, one of the Umayyad princes escaped and made the long journey from there to Spain to found Umayyad rule there, thus beginning the golden age of Islam in Spain. Cordoba was established as the capital and soon became Europe's greatest city not only in population but from the point of view of its cultural and intellectual life. The Umayyads ruled over two centuries until they weakened and were replaced by local rulers. Meanwhile in North Africa, various local dynasties held sway until two powerful Berber dynasties succeeded in uniting much of North Africa and also Spain in the 12th and 13th centuries. After them this area was ruled once again by local dynasties such as the Sharifids of Morocco who still rule in that country. As for Spain itself, Muslim power continued to wane until the last Muslim dynasty was defeated in Granada in 1492 thus bringing nearly eight hundred years of Muslim rule in Spain to an end.

Islamic History after the Mongol Invasion

The Mongols devastated the eastern lands of Islam and ruled from the Sinai Desert to India for a century. But they soon converted to Islam and became known as the Il-Khanids. They were in turn succeeded by Timur and his descendents who made Samarqand their capital and ruled

from 1369 to 1500. The sudden rise of Timur delayed the formation and expansion of the Ottoman empire but soon the Ottomans became the dominant power in the Islamic world.

Ottoman Empire

From humble origins the Turks rose to dominate over the whole of Anatolia and even parts of Europe. In 1453 Mehmet the Conqueror captured Constantinople and put an end to the Byzantine empire. The Ottomans conquered much of eastem Europe and nearly the whole of the Arab world, only Morocco and Mauritania in the West and Yemen, Hadramaut and parts of the Arabian peninsula remaining beyond their control. They reached their zenith of power with Suleyman the Magnificent whose armies reached Hungary and Austria. From the 17th century onward with the rise of Westem European powers and later Russia, the power of the Ottomans began to wane. But they nevertheless remained a force to be reckoned with until the First World War when they were defeated by the Westem nations. Soon thereafter Kamal Ataturk gained power in Turkey and abolished the six centuries of rule of the Ottomans in 1924.

Persia

While the Ottomans were concerned mostly with the westem front of their empire, to the east in Persia a new dynasty called the Safavids came to power in 1502. The Safavids established a powerful state of their own which flourished for over two centuries and became known for the flowering of the arts. Their capital, Isfahan, became one of the most beautiful cities with its blue tiled mosques and exquisite houses. The Afghan invasion of 1736 put an end to Safavid rule and prepared the independence of Afghanistan which occured fommally in the 19th century. Persia itself fell into tummoil until Nader Shah, the last Oriental conqueror, reunited the country and even conquered India. But the rule of the dynasty established by him was short-lived. The Zand dynasty soon took over to be overthrown by the Qajars in 1779 who made Tehran their capital and ruled until 1921 when they were in turn replaced by the Pahlavis.

India

As for India, Islam entered into the land east of the Indus River peacefully. Gradually Muslims gained political power beginning in the early 13th century. But this period which marked the expansion of both Islam and Islamic culture came to an end with the conquest of much of India in 1526 by Babur, one of the Timurid princes. He established the powerful Mogul empire which produced such famous rulers as Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan and which lasted, despite the gradual rise of British power in India, until 1857 when it was officially abolished.

Malaysia and Indonesia

Farther east in the Malay world, Islam began to spread in the 12th century in northem Sumatra and soon Muslim kingdoms were establishd in Java, Sumatra and mainland Malaysia. Despite the colonization of the Malay world, Islam spread in that area covering present day Indonesia, Malaysia, the southern Phililppines and southern Thailand, and is still continuing in islands farther east.

Africa

As far as Africa is concemed, Islam entered into East Africa at the very beginning of the Islamic period but remained confined to the coast for some time, only the Sudan and Somaliland becoming gradually both Arabized and Islamized. West Africa felt the presence of Islam through North African traders who travelled with their camel caravans south of the Sahara. By the 14th century there were already Muslim sultanates in such areas as Mali, and Timbuctu in West Africa and Harar in East Africa had become seats of Islamic leaming.

Gradually Islam penetrated both inland and southward. There also appeared major charismatic figures who inspired intense resistance against European domination. The process of the Islamization of Africa did not cease during the colonial period and continues even today with the result that most Africans are now Muslims carrying on a tradition which has had practically as long a history in certain areas of sub-Saharan Africa as Islam itself.

Islam, Knowledge and Science

The Attitude of the Quran and the Prophet toward Knowledge

slam is a religion based upon knowledge for it is ultimately knowledge of the Oneness of God combined with faith and total commitment to Him that saves man. The text of the Quran is replete with verses inviting man to use his intellect, to ponder, to think and to know, for the goal of human life is to discover the Truth which is none other than worshipping God in His Oneness. The Hadith literature is also full of references to the importance of knowledge. Such sayings of the Prophet as "Seek knowledge even in China", "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave", and "Verily the men of knowledge are the inheritors of the prophets", have echoed throughout the history of Islam and incited Muslims to seek knowledge wherever it might be found. During most of its history, Islamic civilization has been witness to a veritable celebration of knowledge. That is why every traditional Islamic city possessed public and private libraries and some cities like Cordoba and Baghdad boasted of libraries with over 400,000 books. Such cities also had bookstores, some of which sold a large number of titles. That is also why the scholar has always been held in the highest esteem in Islamic society.

Integration of the Pre-Islamic Sciences

As Islam spread northward into Syria, Egypt, and the Persian empire, it came face to face with the sciences of antiquity whose heritage had been preserved in centers which now became a part of the Islamic world. Alexandria had been a major center of sciences and learning for centuries. The Greek leaming cultivated in Alexandria was opposed by the Byzantines who had burned its library long before the advent of Islam. The tradition of Alexandrian learning did not die, however. It was transferred to Antioch and from there farther east to such cities as Edessa by eastern Christians who stood in sharp opposition to Byzantium and wished to have their own independent centers of learning. Moreover, the Persian king, Shapur I, had established Jundishapur in Persia as a second great center of learning matching Antioch. He even invited Indian physicians and mathematicians to teach in this major seat of learning, in addition to the Christian scholars who taught in Syriac as well as the Persians whose medium of instruction was Pahlavi.

Once Muslims established the new Islamic order during the Umayyad period, they turned their attention to these centers of learning which had been preserved and sought to acquaint themselves with the knowledge taught and cultivated in them. They therefore set about with a concerted effort to translate the philosophical and scientific works which were available to them from not only Greek and Syriac (which was the language of eastern Christian scholars) but also from Pahlavi, the scholarly language of pre-Islamic Persia, and even from Sanskrit. Many of the accomplished translators were Christian Arabs such as Hunayn ibn Ishaq, who was also an outstanding physician, and others Persians such as Ibn Muqaffa', who played a major role in the creation of the new Arabic prose style conducive to the expression of philosophical and scientific writings. The great movement of translation lasted from the beginning of the 8th to the end of the 9th century, reaching its peak with the establishment of the House of Wisdom (Bayt alhikmah) by the caliph al-Ma'mun at the beginning of the 9th century.

The result of this extensive effort of the Islamic community to confront the challenge of the presence of the various philosophies and sciences of antiquity and to understand and digest them in its own terms and according to its own world view was the translation of a vast corpus of writings into Arabic. Most of the important philosophical and scientific works of Aristotle and his school, much of Plato and the Pythagorean school, and the major works of Greek astronomy, mathematics and medicine such as the Almagest of Ptolemy, the Elements of Euclid, and the works of Hippocrates and Galen, were all rendered into Arabic. Furthermore, important works of astronomy, mathematics and medicine were translated from Pahlavi and Sanskrit. As a result, Arabic became the most important scientific language of the world for many centuries and the depository of much of the wisdom and the sciences of antiquity.

The Muslims did not translate the scientific and philosophical works of other civilizations out of fear of political or economic domination but because the structure of Islam itself is based upon the primacy of knowledge. Nor did they consider these forms of knowing as "un-Islamic" as long as they confirmed the doctrine of God's Oneness which Islam considers to have been at the heart of every authentic revelation from God. Once these sciences and philosophies confirmed the principle of Oneness, the Muslims considered them as their own. They made them part of their world view and began to cultivate the Islamic sciences based on what they had translated, analyzed, criticized, and assimilated, rejecting what was not in conformity with the Islamic perspective

Mathematical Sciences and Physics

The Muslim mind has always been attracted to the mathematical sciences in accordance with the "abstract" character of the doctrine of Oneness which lies at the heart of Islam. The mathematical sciences have traditionally included astronomy, mathematics itself and much of what is called physics today.

Astronomy

n astronomy the Muslims integrated the astronomical traditions of the Indians, Persians, the ancient Near East and especially the Greeks into a synthesis which began to chart a new chapter in the history of astronomy from the 8th century onward. The Almagest of Ptolemy, whose very name in English reveals the Arabic origin of its Latin translation, was thoroughly studied and its planetary theory criticized by several astronomers of both the eastern and western lands of Islam leading to the major critique of the theory by Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and his students, especially Qutb alDin al-Shirazi, in the 13th century.

The Muslims also observed the heavens carefully and discovered many new stars. The book on stars of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi was in fact translated into Spanish by Alfonso X el Sabio and had a deep influence upon stellar toponymy in European languages. Many star names in English such as Aldabaran still recall their Arabic origin. The Muslims carried out many fresh observations which were contained in astronomical tables called zij. One of the acutest of these observers was al-Battani whose work was followed by numerous others. The zij of al-Ma'mun observed in Baghdad, the Hakimite zij of Cairo, the Toledan Tables of alZarqali and his associates, the ll-Khanid zij of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi observed in Maraghah, and the zij of Ulugh-Beg from Samarqand are among the most famous Islamic astronomical tables. They wielded a great deal of influence upon Western astronomy up to the time of Tycho Brahe. The Muslims were in fact the first to create an astronomical observatory as a scientific institution, this being the observatory of Maraghah in Persia established by al-Tusi. This was indirectly the model for the later European observatories . Many astronomical instruments were developed by Muslims to carry out observation, the most famous being the astrolabe. There existed even mechanical astrolabes perfected by Ibn Samh which must be considered as the ancestor of the mechanical clock.

Astronomical observations also had practical applications including not only finding the direction of Makkah for prayers, but also devising almanacs (the word itself being of Arabic origin). The Muslims also applied their astronomical knowledge to questions of time-keeping and the calendar. The most exact solar calendar existing to this day is the Jalali calendar devised under the direction of 'Umar Khayyam in the 12th century and still in use in Persia and Afghanistan.

Mathematics, Algebra

As for mathematics proper, like astronomy, it received its direct impetus from the Quran not only because of the mathematical structure related to the text of the Sacred Book, but also because the laws of inheritance delineated in the Quran require rather complicated mathematical solutions. Here again Muslims began by integrating Greek and Indian mathematics. The first great Muslim mathematician, al-Khwarazmi, who lived in the 9th century, wrote a treatise on arithmetic whose Latin translation brought what is known as Arabic numerals to the West. To this day guarismo, derived from his name, means figure or digit in

Spanish while algorithm is still used in English. Al-Khwarazmi is also the author of the first book on algebra. This science was developed by Muslims on the basis of earlier Greek and Indian works of a rudimentary nature. The very name algebra comes from the first part of the name of the book of al-Khwarazmi, entitled Kirah al-jahr wa'l-muqabalah. Abu Kamil al-Shuja' discussed algebraic equations with five unknowns. The science was further developed by such figures as al-Karaji until it reached its peak with Khayyam who classified by kind and class algebraic equations up to the third degree.

Geometry

The Muslims also excelled in geometry as reflected in their art. The brothers Banu Musa who lived in the 9th century may be said to be the first outstanding Muslim geometers while their contemporary Thabit ibn Qurrah used the method of exhaustion, giving a glimpse of what was to become integral calculus. Many Muslim mathematicians such as Khayyam and al-Tusi also dealt with the fifth postulate of Euclid and the problems which follow if one tries to prove this postulate within the confines of Eucledian geometry.

Trigonometry

Another branch of mathematics developed by Muslims is trigonometry which was established as a distinct branch of mathematics by al-Biruni. The Muslim mathematicians, especially al-Battani, Abu'l-Wafa', Ibn Yunus and Ibn al-Haytham, also developed spherical astronomy and applied it to the solution of astronomical problems.

Number Theory

The love for the study of magic squares and amicable numbers led Muslims to develop the theory of numbers. Al-Khujandi discovered a particular case of Fermat's theorem that "the sum of two cubes cannot be another cube", while alKaraji analyzed arithmetic and geometric progressions such as: 1^3+2^3+3^3+...+n^3=(1+2+3+...+n)^2.

Al-Biruni also dealt with progressions while Ghiyath al-Din Jamshid al-Kashani brought the study of number theory among Muslims to its peak.

Physics, Balance, Projectile Motion, Optics

In the field of physics the Muslims made contributions in especially three domains. The first was the measurement of specific weights of objects and the study of the balance following upon the work of Archimedes. In this domain the writings of al-Biruni and al-Khazini stand out. Secondly they criticized the Aristotelian theory of projectile motion and tried to quantify this type of motion. The critique of Ibn Sina, Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi, Ibn Bajjah and others led to the development of the idea of impetus and momentum and played an important role in the criticism of Aristotelian physics in the West up to the early writings of Galileo. Thirdly there is the field of optics in which the Islamic sciences produced in Ibn al-Haytham (the Latin Alhazen) who lived in the 11th century, the greatest student of optics between Ptolemy and Witelo. Ibn al-Haytham's main work on optics, the Kitah al-manazir, was also well known in the West as Thesaurus opticus. Ibn al-Haytham solved many optical problems, one of which is named after him, studied the property of lenses, discovered the camera obscura, explained correctly the process of vision, studied the structure of the eye, and explained for the first time why the sun and the moon appear larger on the horizon. His interest in optics was carried out two centuries later by Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi and Kamal al-Din al-Farisi. It was Qutb al-Din who gave the first correct explanation of the formation of the rainbow.

Experimental Method

It is important to recall that in physics as in many other fields of science the Muslims observed, measured and carried out experiments. They must be credited with having developed what came to be known later as the experimental method.

Medical Sciences

The hadiths of the Prophet contain many instructions concerning health including dietary habits; these sayings became the foundation of what came to be known later as "Prophetic medicine" (al-tibb al-nabawi). Because of the great attention paid in Islam to the need to take care of the body and to hygiene, early in Islamic history Muslims began to cultivate the field of

medicine turning once again to all the knowledge that was available to them from Greek, Persian and Indian sources. At first the great physicians among Muslims were mostly Christian but by the 9th century Islamic medicine, properly speaking, was born with the appearance of the major compendium,

Rhazes Anatomy Smallpox Antiseptic Psychosomatic Medicine

The Paradise of Wisdom (Firdaws al-hikmah) by 'Ali ibn Rabban al-Tabari, who synthesized the Hippocratic and Galenic traditions of medicine with those of India and Persia. His student, Muhammad ibn Zakariyya' al-Razi (the Latin Rhazes), was one of the greatest of physicians who emphasized clinical medicine and observation. He was a master of prognosis and psychosomatic medicine and also of anatomy. He was the first to identify and treat smallpox, to use alcohol as an antiseptic and make medical use of mercury as a purgative. His Kitab al-hawi (Continens) is the longest work ever written in Islamic medicine and he was recognized as a medical authority in the West up to the 18th century.

The Canon of Medicine and Meningitis

The greatest of all Muslim physicians, however, was Ibn Sina who was called "the prince of physicians" in the West. He synthesized Islamic medicine in his major masterpiece, al-Qanun fi'l tibb (The Canon of Medicine), which is the most famous of all medical books in history. It was the final authority in medical matters in Europe for nearly six centuries and is still taught wherever Islamic medicine has survived to this day in such lands as Pakistan and India. Ibn Sina discovered many drugs and identified and treated several ailments such as meningitis but his greatest contribution was in the philosophy of medicine. He created a system of medicine within which medical practice could be carried out and in which physical and psychological factors, drugs and diet are combined.

Pulmonary Circulation

After Ibn Sina, Islamic medicine divided into several branches. In the Arab world Egypt remained a major center for the study of medicine, especially ophthalmology which reached its peak at the court of al-Hakim. Cairo possessed excellent hospitals which also drew physicians from other lands including Ibn Butlan, author of the famous Calendar of Health, and Ibn Nafis who discovered the lesser or pulmonary circulation of the blood long before Michael Servetus, who is usually credited with the discovery.

Gynecology

As for the western lands of Islam including Spain, this area was likewise witness to the appearance of outstanding physicians such as Sa'd al-Katib of Cordoba who composed a treatise on gynecology, and the greatest Muslim figure in surgery, the 12th century Abu'l-Qasim al-Zahrawi (the Latin Albucasis) whose medical masterpiece Kitab al-tasrif was well known in the West as Concessio. One must also mention the Ibn Zuhr family which produced several outstanding physicians and Abu Marwan 'Abd al-Malik who was the Maghrib's most outstanding clinical physician. The well known Spanish philosophers, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Rushd, were also outstanding physicians.

Islamic medicine continued in Persia and the other eastern lands of the Islamic world under the influence of Ibn Sina with the appearance of major Persian medical compendia such as the Treasury of Sharaf al-Din al-Jurjani and the commentaries upon the Canon by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi. Even after the Mongol invasion, medical studies continued as can be seen in the work of Rashid al-Din Fadlallah, and for the first time there appeared translations of Chinese medicine and interest in acupuncture among Muslims. The Islamic medical tradition was revived in the Safavid period when several diseases such as whooping cough were diagnosed and treated for the first time and much attention was paid to pharmacology. Many Persian doctors such as 'Ayn al-Mulk of Shiraz also travelled to India at this time to usher in the golden age of Islamic medicine in the subcontinent and to plant the seed of the Islamic medical tradition which continues to flourish to this day in the soil of that land.

Major Hospitals

The Ottoman world was also an arena of great medical activity derived from the heritage of Ibn Sina. The Ottoman Turks were especially known for the creation of major hospitals and medical centers. These included not only units for the care of the physically ill, but also wards for patients with psychological ailments. The Ottomans were also the first to receive the influence of modem European medicine in both medicine and phammacology.
In mentioning Islamic hospitals it is necessary to mention that all major Islamic cities had hospitals; some like those of Baghdad were teaching hospitals while some like the Nasiri hospital of Cairo had thousands of beds for patients with almost any type of illness. Hygiene in these hospitals was greatly emphasized and al-Razi had even written a treatise on hygiene in hospitals. Some hospitals also specialized in particular diseases including psychological ones. Cairo even had a hospital which specialilzed in patients having insomnia.

Pharmacology

Islamic medical authorities were also always concemed with the significance of pharmacology and many important works such as the Canon have whole books devoted to the subject. The Muslims became heir not only to the pharmacological knowledge of the Greeks as contained in the works of Dioscorides, but also the vast herbal phammacopias of the Persians and Indians. They also studied the medical effects of many drugs, especially herbs, themselves. The greatest contributions in this field came from Maghribi scientists such as Ibn Juljul, Ibn al-Salt and the most original of Muslim phammacologists, the 12th century scientist, al-Ghafiqi, whose Book of Simple Drugs provides the best descriptions of the medical properties of plants known to Muslims. Islamic medicine combined the use of drugs for medical purposes with dietary considerations and a whole lifestyle derived from the teachings of Islam to create a synthesis which has not died out to this day despite the introduction of modem medicine into most of the Islamic world.

Natural History and Geography

The vast expanse of the Islamic world enabled the Muslims to develop natural history based not only on the Mediterranean world, as was the case of the Greek natural historians, but also on most of the Eurasian and even African land masses. Knowledge of minerals, plants and animals was assembled from areas as far away as the Malay world and synthesized for the first time by Ibn Sina in his Kitab al-Shifa' (The Book of Healing). Such major natural historians as al-Mas'udi intertwined natural and human history. Al-Biruni likewise in his study of India turned to the natural history and even geology of the region, describing correctly the sedimentary nature of the Ganges basin. He also wrote the most outstanding Muslim work on mineralogy.

Botany, Zoology

As for botany, the most important treatises were composed in the 12th century in Spain with the appearance of the work of al-Ghafiqi. This is also the period when the best known Arabic work on agriculture, the Kitab al-falahah, was written. The Muslims also showed much interest in zoology especially in horses as witnessed by the classical text of al-Jawaliqi, and in falcons and other hunting birds. The works of al-Jahiz and al-Damiri are especially famous in the field of zoology and deal with the literary, moral and even theological dimensions of the study of animals as well as the purely zoological aspects of the subject. This is also true of a whole class of writings on the "wonders of creation" of which the book of Abu Yahya al-Qazwini, the 'Aja'ih al-makhluqat (The Wonders of Creation) is perhaps the most famous.

Geography

Likewise in geography, Muslims were able to extend their horizons far beyond the world of Ptolemy. As a result of travel over land and by sea and the facile exchange of ideas made possible by the unified structure of the Islamic world and the hajj which enables pilgrims from all over the Islamic world to gather and exchange ideas in addition to visiting the House of God, a vast amount of knowledge of areas from the Pacific to the Atlantic was assembled. The Muslim geographers starting with al-Khwarazmi, who laid the foundation of this science among Muslims in the 9th century, began to study the geography of practically the whole globe minus the Americas, dividing the earth into the traditional seven climes each of which they studied

carefully from both a geographical and climactic point of view. They also began to draw maps some of which reveal with remarkable accuracy many features such as the origin of the Nile, not discovered in the West until much later. The foremost among Muslim geographers was Abu 'Abdallah al-Idrisi, who worked at the court of Roger II in Sicily and who dedicated his famous book, Kitab al-rujari (The Book of Roger) to him. His maps are among the great achievements of Islamic science. It was in fact with the help of Muslim geographers and navigators that Magellan crossed the Cape of Good Hope into the Indian Ocean. Even Columbus made use of their knowledge in his discovery of America.

Chemistry

The very name alchemy as well as its derivative chemistry come from the Arabic al-kimiya'. The Muslims mastered Alexandrian and even certain elements of Chinese alchemy and very early in their history, produced their greatest alchemist, Jabir ibn Hayyan (the Latin Geber) who lived in the 8th century. Putting the cosmological and symbolic aspects of alchemy aside, one can assert that this art led to much experimentation with various materials and in the hands of Muhammad ibn Zakariyya' al-Razi was converted into the science of chemistry. To this day certain chemical instruments such as the alembic (al-'anbiq) still bear their original Arabic names and the mercury-sulphur theory of Islamic alchemy remains as the foundation of the acid-base theory of chemistry. Al-Razi's division of materials into animal, vegetable and mineral is still prevalent and a vast body of knowledge of materials accumulated by Islamic alchemists and chemists has survived over the centuries in both East and West. For example the use of dyes in objects of Islamic art ranging from carpets to miniatures or the making of glass have much to do with this branch of learning which the West learned completely from Islamic sources since alchemy was not studied and practiced in the West before the translation of Arabic texts into Latin in the 11th century .

Technology

Islam inherited the millenial experience in various forrns of technology from the peoples who entered the fold of Islam and the nations which became part of Dar al-Islam. A wide range of technological knowledge, from the building of water wheels by the Romans to the underground water system by the Persians, became part and parcel of the technology of the newly founded order. Muslims also imported certain kinds of technology from the Far East such as paper which they brought from China and whose technology they later transmitted to the West. They also developed many forms of technology on the basis of earlier existing knowledge such as the metallurgical art of making the famous Damascene swords, an art which goes back to the making of steel several thousand years before on the Iranian plateau. Likewise Muslims developed new architectural techniques of vaulting, methods of ventilation, preparations of dyes, techniques of weaving, technologies related to irrigation and numerous other forms of technology, some of which survive to this day.

Man and Nature

In general Islamic civilization emphasized the harmony between man and nature as seen in the traditional design of Islamic cities. Maximum use was made of natural elements and forces, and men built in harmony with, not in opposition to nature. Some of the Muslim technological feats such as dams which have survived for over a millenium, domes which can withstand earthquakes, and steel which reveals incredible metallurgical know-how, attest to the exceptional attainment of Muslims in many fields of technology. In fact it was a vastly superior technology that first impressed the Crusaders in their unsuccessful attempt to capture the Holy Land and much of this technology was brought back by the Crusaders to the rest of Europe.

Architecture

One of the major achievements of Islamic civilization is architecture which combines technology Treatises on natural and art. The great masterpieces of Islamic architecture from the Cordoba Mosque and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem to the Taj Mahal in India, scientists were often display this perfect wedding between the artistic illustrated with detailed principles of Islam and remarkable technological know-how. Much of the outstanding medieval

facilitate teaching of the architecture of the West is in fact indebted to the techniques of Islamic architecture. When one views the Notre Dame in Paris or some other Gothic cathedral, one is reminded of the building techniques which travelled from Muslim Cordoba northward. Gothic arches as well as interior courtyards of so many medieval and Renaissance European structures remind the viewer of the Islamic architectural examples from which they originally drew. In fact the great medieval European architectural tradition is one of the elements of Western civilization most directly linked with the Islamic world, while the presence of Islamic architecture ean also be directly experienced in the Moorish style found not only in Spain and Latin America, but in the southwestern United States as well.

Influence of Islamic Science and Learning Upon the West

The oldest university in the world which is still functioning is the eleven hundred-year-old Islamic university of Fez, Morocco, known as the Qarawiyyin. This old tradition of Islamic learning influenced the West greatly through Spain. In this land where Muslims, Christians and Jews lived for the most part peacefully for many centuries, translations began to be made in the 11th century mostly in Toledo of Islamic works into Latin often through the intermediary of Jewish scholars most of whom knew Arabic and often wrote in Arabic. As a result of these translations, Islamic thought and through it much of Greek thought became known to the West and Western schools of learning began to flourish. Even the Islamic educational system was emulated in Europe and to this day the term chair in a university reflects the Arabic kursi (literally seat) upon which a teacher would sit to teach his students in the madrasah (school of higher learning). As European civillization grew and reached the high Middle Ages, there was hardly a field of learning or form of art, whether it was literature or architecture, where there was not some influence of Islam present. Islamic learning became in this way part and parcel of Western civilization even if with the advent of the Renaissance, the West not only turned against its own medieval past but also sought to forget the long relation it had had with the Islamic world, one which was based on intellectual respect despite religious opposition.

Islam In The Modern World

"Most surely man is in loss, except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience." (Quran, Surah CIII: 2-3).

Aftermath of the Colonial Period

At the height of European colonial expansion in the 19th century, most of the Islamic world was under colonial rule with the exception of a few regions such as the heart of the Ottoman empire, Persia, Afghanistan, Yemen and certain parts of Arabia. But even these areas were under foreign influence or, in the case of the Ottomans, under constant threat. After the First World War with the breakup of the Ottoman empire, a number of Arab states such as Iraq became independent, others like Jordan were created as a new entity and yet others like Palestine, Syria and Lebanon were either mandated or turned into French colonies. As for Arabia, it was at this time that Saudi Arabia became finally consolidated. As for other parts of the Islamic world, Egypt which had been ruled by the descendents of Muhammad Ali since the l9th century became more independent as a result of the fall of the Ottomans, Turkey was turned into a secular republic by Ataturk, and the Pahlavi dynasty began a new chapter in Persia where its name reverted to its eastern traditional form of Iran. But most of the rest of the Islamic world remained under colonial rule.

Arab

It was only after the Second World War and the dismemberment of the British, French, Dutch and Spanish empires that the rest of the Islamic world gained its independence. In the Arab world, Syria and Lebanon became independent at the end of the war as did Libya and the shaykdoms around the Gulf and the Arabian Sea by the 1960's. The North African countries of Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria had to fight a difficult and, in the case of Algeria, long and protracted war to gain their freedom which did not come until a decade later for Tunisia and Morocco and two decades later for Algeria. Only Palestine did not become independent but was partitioned in 1948 with the establishment of the state of Israel.

India

In India Muslims participated in the freedom movement against British rule along with Hindus and when independence finally came in 1947, they were able to create their own homeland, Pakistan, which came into being for the sake of Islam and became the most populated Muslim state although many Muslims remained in India. In 1971, however, the two parts of the state broke up, East Pakistan becoming Bengladesh.

Far East

Farther east still, the Indonesians finally gained their independence from the Dutch and the Malays theirs from Britain. At first Singapore was part of Malaysia but it separated in 1963 to become an independent state. Small colonies still persisted in the area and continued to seek their independence, the kingdom of Brunei becoming independent as recently as 1984.

Africa

In Africa also major countries with large or majority Muslim populations such as Nigeria, Senegal and Tanzania began to gain their independence in the 1950's and 1960's with the result that by the end of the decade of the 60's most parts of the Islamic world were formed into independent national states. There were, however, exceptions. The Muslim states in the Soviet Union failed to gain their autonomy or independence. The same holds true for Sinkiang (called Eastem Turkestan by Muslim geographers) while in Eritrea and the southern Philippines Muslim independence movements still continue.

National States

While the world of Islam has entered into the modern world in the form of national states, continuous attempts are made to create closer cooperation within the Islamic world as a whole and to bring about greater unity. This is seen not only in the meetings of the Muslim heads of state and the establishment of the OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries) with its own secretariat, but also in the creation of institutions dealing with the whole of the Islamic world. Among the most important of these is the Muslim World League (Rabitat al-alam al-Islami) with its headquarters in Makkah. Saudi Arabia has in fact played a pivotal role in the creation and maintenance of such organizations.

Revival and Reassertation of Islam

Muslims did not wish to gain only their political independence. They also wished to assert their own religious and cultural identity. From the 18th century onward Muslim reformers appeared upon the scene who sought to reassert the teachings of Islam and to reform society on the basis of Islamic teachings. One of the first among this group was Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, who hailed from the Arabian peninsula and died there in 1792. This reformer was supported by Muhammad ibn al-Sa'ud, the founder of the first Saudi state. With this support Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab was able to spread his teachings not only in Arabia but even beyond its borders to other Islamic lands where his reforms continue to wield influence to this day.

In the 19th century Islamic assertion took several different forms ranging from the Mahdi movement of the Sudan and the Sanusiyyah in North Africa which fought wars against European colonizers, to educational movements such as that of Aligarh in India aiming to reeducate Muslims. In Egypt which, because of al-Azhar University, remains to this day central to Islamic learning, a number of reformers appear, each addressing some aspect of Islamic thought. Some were concerned more with law, others economics, and yet others the challenges posed by Western civilization with its powerful science and technology. These included Jamal al-Din al-Afghani who hailed originally from Persia but settled in Cairo and who was the great champion of Pan-Islamism, that is the movement to unite the Islamic world politically as well as religiously. His student, Muhammad 'Abduh, who became the rector of al-Azhar. was also very influential in Islamic theology and thought. Also of considerable influence was his Syrian student, Rashid Rida, who held a position closer to that of 'Abd al-Wahhab and

stood for the strict application of the Shari'ah. Among the most famous of these thinkers is Muhammad Iqbal, the outstanding poet and philosopher who is considered as the father of Pakistan.

Reform Organizations

Moreover, as Western influence began to penetrate more deeply into the fiber of Islamic society, organizations gradually grew up whose goal was to reform society in practice along Islamic lines and prevent its secularization. These included the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-muslimin) founded in Egypt and with branches in many Muslim countries, and the Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan founded by the influential Mawlana Mawdudi. These organizations have been usually peaceful and have sought to reestablish an Islamic order through education. During the last two decades, however, as a result of the frustration of many Muslims in the face of pressures coming from a secularized outside world, some have sought to reject the negative aspects of Western thought and culture and to return to an Islamic society based completely on the application of the Shari 'ah. Today in every Muslim country there are strong movements to preserve and propagate Islamic teachings. In countries such as Saudi Arabia Islamic Law is already being applied and in fact is the reason for the prosperity, development and stability of the country. In other countries where Islamic Law is not being applied, however, most of the effort of Islamic movements is spent in making possible the full application of the Shari'ah so that the nation can enjoy prosperity along with the fulfillment of the faith of its people. In any case the widespread desire for Muslims to have the religious law of Islam applied and to reassert their religious values and their own identity must not be equated with exceptional violent eruptions which do exist but which are usually treated sensationally and taken out of proportion by the mass media in the West.

Education and Science in the Islamic World

In seeking to live successfully in the modern world, in independence and according to Islamic principles, Muslim countries have been emphasizing a great deal the significance of the role of education and the importance of mastering Western science and technology. Already in the 19th century, certain Muslim countries such as Egypt, Ottoman Turkey and Persia established institutions of higher learning where the modem sciences and especially medicine were taught. During this century educational institutions at all levels have proliferated throughout the Islamic world. Nearly every science ranging from mathematics to biology as well as various fields of modern technology are taught in these institutions and some notable scientists have been produced by the Islamic world, men and women who have often combined education in these institutions with training in the West.

In various parts of the Islamic world there is, however, a sense that educational institutions must be expanded and also have their standards improved to the level of the best institutions in the world in various fields of leaming especially science and technology. At the same time there is an awareness that the educational system must be based totally on Islamic principles and the influence of alien cultural and ethical values and norms, to the extent that they are negative, be diminished. To remedy this problem a number of international Islamic educational conferences have been held, the first one in Makkah in 1977, and the foremost thinkers of the Islamic world have been brought together to study and ponder over the question of the relation between Islam and modern science. This is an ongoing process which is at the center of attention in many parts of the Islamic world and which indicates the significance of educational questions in the Islamic world today.

Frequently Asked Questions About Islam

What is Islam?

Islam is not a new religion, but the same truth that God revealed through all His prophets to every people. For a fifth of the world's population, Islam is both a religion and a complete way of life. Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy, and forgiveness, and the majority have nothing to do with the extremely grave events which have come to be associated with their faith.

Who are the Muslims?

One billion people from a vast range of races, nationalities and cultures across the globe--from the southern Philippines to Nigeria--are united by their common Islamic faith. About 18% live in the Arab world; the world's largest Muslim community is in Indonesia; substantial parts of Asia and most of Africa are Muslim, while significant minorities are to be found in the Soviet Union, China, North and South America, and Europe.

What do Muslims believe?

Muslims believe in One, Unique, Incomparable God; in the Angels created by Him; in the prophets through whom His revelations were brought to mankind; in the Day of Judgement and individual accountability for actions; in God's complete authority over human destiny and in life after death. Muslims believe in a chain of prophets starting with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elias, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus, peace be upon them. But God's final message to man, a reconfirmation of the eternal message and a summing-up of all that has gone before was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) through Gabriel.

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How does someone become a Muslim?

Simply by saying 'There is no god apart from God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.' By this declaration the believer announces his or her faith in all God's messengers, and the scriptures they brought.

What does 'Islam' mean?

The Arabic word 'Islam' simply means 'submission', and derives from a word meaning 'peace'. In a religious context it means complete submission to the will of God. 'Mohammedanism' is thus a misnomer because it suggests that Muslims worship Muhammad (SAW) rather than God. 'Allah' is the Arabic name for God, which is used by Arab Muslims and Christians alike.

Why does Islam often seem strange?

Islam may seem exotic or even extreme in the modern world. Perhaps this is because religion does not dominate everyday life in the West today, whereas Muslims have religion always uppermost in their minds, and make no division between secular and sacred. They believe that the Divine Law, the Shari'a, should be taken very seriously, which is why issues related to religion are still so important.

Do Islam and Christianity have different origins?

No. Together with Judaism, they go back to the prophet and patriarch Abraham, and their three prophets are directly descended from his sons--Muhammad (SAW) from the eldest, Ishmael, and Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them, from Isaac. Abraham established the settlement which today is the city of Makkah, and built the Ka'ba towards which all Muslims turn when they pray.

What is the Ka'ba?

The Ka'ba is the place of worship which God commanded Abraham and Ishmael to build over four thousand years ago. The building was constructed of stone on what many believe was the original site of a sanctuary established by Adam. God commanded Abraham to summon all mankind to visit this place, and when pilgrims go there today they say 'At Thy service, O Lord', in response to Abraham's summons.

Who is Muhammad?

Muhammad (SAW) was born in Makkah in the year 570, at a time when Christianity was not yet fully established in Europe. Since his father died before his birth, and his mother shortly afterwards, he was raised by his uncle from the respected tribe of Quraysh. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, so that he was sought after for his ability to arbitrate in disputes. The historians describe him as calm and meditative.

Muhammad (SAW) was of a deeply religious nature, and had long detested the decadence of his society. It became his habit to meditate from time to time in the Cave of Hira near the summit of Jabal al-Nur, the 'Mountain of Light' near Makkah.

How did he become a prophet and a messenger of God?

At the age of 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muhammad received his first revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel. This revelation, which continued for twenty-three years, is known as the Quran.

As soon as he began to recite the words he heard from Gabriel, and to preach the truth which God had revealed to him, he and his small group of followers suffered bitter persecution, which grew so fierce that in the year 622 God gave them the command to emigrate. This event, the Hijra, 'migration', in which they left Makkah for the city of Madinah some 260 miles to the north, marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

After several years, the Prophet (SAW) and his followers were able to return to Makkah, where they forgave their enemies and established Islam definitively. Before the Prophet (SAW) died at the age of 63, the greater part of Arabia was Muslim, and within a century of his death Islam had spread to Spain in the West and as far East as China.

How did the spread of Islam affect the world?

Among the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam was the simplicity of its doctrine. Islam calls for faith in only One God worthy of worship. It also repeatedly instructs man to use his powers of intelligence and observation.

Within a few years, great civilizations and universities were flourishing, for according to the Prophet (SAW) 'seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim man and woman'. The synthesis of Eastern and Western ideas and of new thought with old, brought about great advances in medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, geography, architecture, art, literature, and history. Many crucial systems such as algebra, the Arabic numerals, and also the concept of the zero (vital to the advancement of mathematics), were transmitted to medieval Europe from Islam. Sophisticated instruments which were to make possible the European voyages of discovery were developed, including the astrolabe, the quadrant and good navigational maps.

The Prophet (SAW) said, 'Seek knowledge even into China': the Hui Shen mosque was built in the seventh century.

What is the Quran?

The Quran is a record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). It was memorized by Muhammad (SAW) and then dictated to his Companions, and written down by scribes, who cross-checked it during his lifetime. Not one word of its 114 chapters, Suras, has been changed over the centuries, so that the Quran is in every detail the unique and miraculous text which was revealed to Muhammad (SAW) fourteen centuries ago.

What is the Quran about?

The Quran, the last revealed Word of God, is the prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all the subjects which concern us as human beings: wisdom, doctrine,

worship, and law, but its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures. At the same time it provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct and an equitable economic system.

Are there any other sacred sources?

Yes, the sunna, the practice and example of the Prophet (SAW), is the second authority for Muslims. A hadith is a reliably transmitted report of what the Prophet (SAW) said, did, or approved. Belief in the sunna is part of the Islamic faith.

Examples of the Prophet's sayings

The Prophet (SAW) said:

'God has no mercy on one who has no mercy for others.'

'None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.'

'He who eats his fill while his neighbor goes without food is not a believer.'

'The truthful and trusty businessman is associated with the prophets the saints, and the martyrs.'

'Powerful is not he who knocks the other down, indeed powerful is he who controls himself in a fit of anger.'

'God does not judge according to your bodies and appearances but He scans your hearts and looks into your deeds.'

'A man walking along a path felt very thirsty. Reaching a well he descended into it, drank his fill and came up. Then he saw a dog with its tongue hanging out, trying to lick up mud to quench its thirst. The man saw that the dog was feeling the same thirst as he had felt so he went down into the well again and filled his shoe with water and gave the dog a drink. God forgave his sins for this action.' The Prophet (SAW) was asked: 'Messenger of God, are we rewarded for kindness towards animals?' He said, 'There is a reward for kindness to every living thing.'

(From the hadith collections of Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi and Bayhaqi.)

What are the 'Five Pillars' of Islam?

They are the framework of the Muslim life: faith, prayer, concern for the needy, self-purification, and the pilgrimage to Makkah for those who are able.

First Pillar: Faith

There is no god worthy of worship except God and Muhammad is His messenger. This declaration of faith is called the Shahada, a simple formula which all the faithful pronounce. In Arabic, the first part is la ilaha illa'Llah - 'there is no god except God'; ilaha (god) can refer to anything which we may be tempted to put in place of God--wealth, power, and the like. Then comes illa'Llah: 'except God', the source of all Creation. The second part of the Shahada is Muhammadun rasulu'Llah: 'Muhammad is the messenger of God.' A message of guidance has come through a man like ourselves.

Second Pillar: Prayer

Salat is the name for the obligatory prayers which are performed five times a day, and are a direct link between the worshipper and God. There is no hierarchical authority in Islam, and no priests, so the prayers are led by a learned person who knows the Quran, chosen by the congregation. These five prayers contain verses from the Quran, and are said in Arabic, the language of the Revelation, but personal supplication can be offered in one's own language. Prayers are said at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall, and thus determine the rhythm of the entire day. Although it is preferable to worship together in a mosque, a Muslim may pray almost anywhere, such as in fields, offices, factories and universities. Visitors to the Muslim world are struck by the centrality of prayers in daily life.

A translation of the Call to Prayer is:

'God is most great. God is most great. God is most great. God is most great. I testify that there is no god except God. I testify that there is no god except God. I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God. I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God. Come to prayer! Come to prayer! Come to success (in this life and the Hereafter)! Come to success! God is most great. God is most great. There is no god except God.'

Once Muslims prayed towards Jerusalem, but during the Prophet's lifetime it was changed to Makkah. From the minbar, the pulpit, the Imam who leads the prayer gives the sermon at the Friday noon community prayers.

Third Pillar: Zakat

One of the most important principles of Islam is that all things belong to God, and that wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust. The word zakat means both 'purification' and 'growth'. Our possessions are purified by setting aside a proportion for those in need, and, like the pruning of plants, this cutting back balances and encourages new growth.

Each Muslim calculates his or her own zakat individually. For most purposes this involves the payment each year of two and a half percent of one's capital.

A pious person may also give as much as he or she pleases as sadaqa, and does so preferably in secret. Although this word can be translated as 'voluntary charity' it has a wider meaning. The Prophet (SAW) said: 'Even meeting your brother with a cheerful face is charity.'

TheProphet (SAW) said: 'Charity is a necessity for every Muslim.' He was asked: 'What if a person has nothing?' TheProphet (SAW) replied: 'He should work with his own hands for his benefit and then give something out of such earnings in charity.' The Companions asked: 'What if he is not able to work?' The Prophet (SAW) said: 'He should help poor and needy persons.' The Companions further asked 'What if he cannot do even that?' The Prophet (SAW) said 'He should urge others to do good.' The Companions said 'What if he lacks that also?' The Prophet (SAW) said 'He should check himself from doing evil. That is also charity.'

Fourth Pillar: The Fast

Every year in the month of Ramadan, all Muslims fast from first light until sundown, abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations. Those who are sick, elderly, or on a joumey, and women who are pregnant or nursing are permitted to break the fast and make up an equal number of days later in the year. If they are physically unable to do this, they must feed a needy person for every day missed. Children begin to fast (and to observe the prayer) from puberty, although many start earlier.

Although the fast is most beneficial to the health, it is regarded principally as a method of selfpurification. By cutting oneself off from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person gains true sympathy with those who go hungry as well as growth in one's spiritual life.

Fifth Pillar: The Pilgrimmage (Hajj)

The annual pilgrimage to Makkah, the Hajj, is an obligation only for those who are physically and financially able to perform it. Nevertheless, about two million people go to Makkah each year from every comer of the globe providing a unique opportunity for those of different nations to meet one another. Although Makkah is always filled with visitors, the annual Hajj begins in the twelfth month of the Islamic year (which is lunar, not solar, so that Hajj and Ramadan fall sometimes in summer, sometimes in winter). Pilgrims wear special clothes: simple garments which strip away distinctions of class and culture, so that all stand equal before God.

The rites of the Hajj, which are of Abrahamic origin, include circling the Ka'ba seven times, and going seven times between the mountains of Safa and Marwa as did Hagar during her search for water. Then the pilgrims stand together on the wide plain of Arafa and join in prayers for God's forgiveness, in what is often thought of as a preview of the Last Judgement.

In previous centunes the Hajj was an arduous undertaking. Today, however, Saudi Arabia provides millions of people with water, modem transport, and the most up-to-date health facilities.

The close of the Hajj is marked by a festival, the Eid al-Adha, which is celebrated with prayers and the exchange of gifts in Muslim communities everywhere. This, and the Eid al-Fitr, a feast-day commemorating the end of Ramadan, are the main festivals of the Muslim calendar.

Does Islam tolerate other beliefs?

The Quran says: God forbids you not, with regards to those who fight you not for [your] faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them; for God loveth those who are just. (Quran, 60.8)
It is one function of Islamic law to protect the privileged status of minorities, and this is why non-Muslim places of worship have flourished all over the Islamic world. History provides many examples of Muslim tolerance towards other faiths: when the caliph Omar entered Jerusalem in the year 634, Islam granted freedom of worship to all religious communities in the city.
Islamic law also permits non-Muslim minonties to set up their own courts, which implement family laws drawn up by the minorities themselves.
When the caliph Omar took Jerusalem from the Byzantines, he insisted on entering the city with only a small number of his companions. Proclaiming to the inhabitants that their lives and property were safe, and that their places of worship would never be taken from them, he asked the Christian patriarch Sophronius to accompany him on a visit to all the holy places.
The Patriarch invited him to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but he preferred to pray outside its gates, saying that if he accepted, later generations of Muslims might use his action as an excuse to turn it into a mosque. Above is the mosque built on the spot where Omar did pray.
According to Islam, man is not born in 'onginal sin'. He is God's vicegerent on earth. Every child is born with the fitra, an innate disposition towards virtue, knowledge, and beauty. Islam considers itself to be the 'primordial religion', din al-hanif, it seeks to return man to his original, true nature in which he is in harmony with creation, inspired to do good, and confirming the Oneness of God.

What do Muslims think about Jesus?

Muslims respect and revere Jesus (SAW) and await his Second Coming. They consider him one of the greatest of God's messengers to mankind. A Muslim never refers to him simply as 'Jesus', but always adds the phrase 'upon him be peace'. The Quran confirms his virgin birth (a chapter of the Quran is entitled 'Mary'), and Mary is considered the purest woman in all creation. The Quran describes the Annunciation as follows:
'Behold!' the Angel said, 'God has chosen you, and purified you, and chosen you above the women of all nations. O Mary, God gives you good news of a word from Him, whose name shall be the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, honored in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near to God. He shall speak to the people from his cradle and in maturity, and shall be of the righteous.'
She said: 'O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?' He said: 'Even so; God creates what He will. When He decrees a thing He says to it, "Be!" and it is.' (Quran, 3.42-7)
Jesus (SAW) was born miraculously through the same power which had brought Adam (SAW) into being without a father:
Truly, the likeness of Jesus with God is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, and then said to him, 'Be!' and he was. (3.59)
During his prophetic mission Jesus (SAW) performed many miracles. The Quran tells us that he said:
'I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it and it becomes a bird by God's leave. And I heal the blind, and the lepers, and I raise the dead by God's leave.' (3.49)
Neither Muhammad (SAW) norJesus (SAW) came to change the basic doctrine of the belief in One God, brought by earlier prophets, but to confirm and renew it. In the Quran Jesus (SAW) is reported as saying that he came:
'To attest the law which was before me. And to make lawful to you paff of what was forbidden you; I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, so fear God and obey Me.' (3:5O)
The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said:

'Whoever believes there is no god but God, alone without partner, that Muhammad (SAW) is His messenger, that Jesus is the servant and messenger of God, His word breathed into Mary and a spirit emanating from Him, and that Paradise and Hell are true, shall be received by God into Heaven.' (Hadith from Bukhari)

Why is the family so important to Muslims?

The family is the foundation of Islamic society. The peace and security offered by a stable family unit is greatly valued, and seen as essential for the spiritual growth of its members. A harmonious social order is created by the existence of extended families; children are treasured, and rarely leave home until the time they marry.

What about Muslim women ?

Islam sees a woman, whether single or married, as an individual in her own right, with the right to own and dispose of her property and earnings. A marriage dowry is given by the groom to the bride for her own personal use, and she keeps her own family name rather than taking her husband's.

Both men and women are expected to dress in a way which is modest and dignified; the traditions of female dress found in some Muslim countries are often the expression of local customs.

The Messenger of God said:

'The most perfect in faith amongst believers is he who is best in manner and kindest to his wife.'

Can a Muslim have more than one wife?

The religion of Islam was revealed for all societies and all times and so accommodates widely differing social requirements. Circumstances may warrant the taking of another wife but the right is granted, according to the Quran, only on condition that the husband is scrupulously fair.

s an Islamic marriage like a Christian marriage?

A Muslim marriage is not a 'sacrament', but a simple, legal agreement in which either partner is free to include conditions. Marriage customs thus vary widely from country to country. As a result, divorce is not common, although it is not forbidden as a last resort. According to Islam, no Muslim girl can be forced to marry against her will: her parents will simply suggest young men they think may be suitable.

How do Muslims treat the elderly?

In the Islamic world there are no old people's homes. The strain of caring for one's parents in this most difficult time of their lives is considered an honor and blessing, and an opportunity for great spiritual growth. God asks that we not only pray for our parents, but act with limitless compassion, remembering that when we were helpless children they preferred us to themselves. Mothers are particularly honored: the Prophet (SAW) taught that 'Paradise lies at the feet of mothers'. When they reach old age, Muslim parents are treated mercifully, with the same kindness and selflessness.

In Islam, serving one's parents is a duty second only to prayer, and it is their right to expect it. It is considered despicable to express any irritation when, through no fault of their own, the old become difficult.

The Quran says: Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and be kind to parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, do not say 'uff' to them or chide them, but speak to them in terms of honor and kindness. Treat them with humility, and say, 'My Lord! Have mercy on them, for they did care for me when I was little'. (17.23-4)

How do Muslims view death?

Like Jews and Christians, Muslims believe that the present life is only a trial preparation for the next realm of existence. Basic articles of faith include: the Day of Judgement, resurrection, Heaven and Hell. When a Muslim dies, he or she is washed, usually by a family member, wrapped in a clean white cloth, and buried with a simple prayer preferably the same day. Muslims consider this one of the final services they can do for their relatives, and an opportunity to remember their own brief existence here on earth. The Prophet (SAW) taught

that three things can continue to help a person even after death; charity which he had given, knowledge which he had taught and prayers on their behalf by a righteous child.

What does Islam say about war?

Like Christianity, Islam permits fighting in self-defence, in defence of religion, or on the part of those who have been expelled forcibly from their homes. It lays down strict rules of combat which include prohibitions against harming civilians and against destroying crops, trees and livestock. As Muslims see it, injustice would be triumphant in the world if good men were not prepared to risk their lives in a righteous cause. The Quran says:

'Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. God does not love transgressors.' (2.190)

'If they seek peace, then seek you peace. And trust in God for He is the One that heareth and knoweth all things.' (8.61)

War, therefore, is the last resort, and is subject to the rigorous conditions laid down by the sacred law. The term jihad literally means 'struggle', and Muslims believe that there are two kinds of jihad. The other jihad is the inner struggle which everyone wages against egotistic desires, for the sake of attaining inner peace.

What about food?

Although much simpler than the dietary law followed by Jews and the early Christians, the code which Muslims observe forbids the consumption of pig meat or any kind of intoxicating dnnk.

The Prophet taught that 'your body has rights over you', and the consumption of wholesome food and the leading of a healthy lifestyle are seen as religious obligations.

The Prophet (SAW) said: 'Ask God for certainty [of faith] and well-being; for after certainty, no one is given any gift better than health!'

What is Islam's presence in the United States?

It is almost impossible to generalize about American Muslims: converts, immigrants, factory workers, doctors; all are making their own contribution to America's future. This complex community is unified by a common faith, underpinned by a countrywide network of a thousand mosques.

Muslims were early arrivals in North America. By the eighteenth century there were many thousands of them, working as slaves on plantations. These early communities, cut off from their heritage and families, inevitably lost their Islamic identity as time went by. Today many Afro-American Muslims play an important role in the Islamic community.

The nineteenth century, however, saw the beginnings of an influx of Arab Muslims, most of whom settled in the major industrial centers where they worshipped in hired rooms. The early twentieth century witnessed the arrival of several hundred thousand Muslims from Eastem Europe: the first Albanian mosque was opened in Maine in 1915; others soon followed, and a group of Polish Muslims opened a mosque in Brooklyn in 1928.

In 1947 the Washington Islamic Center was founded during the term of President Truman, and several nationwide organizations were set up in the fifties. The same period saw the establishment of other communities whose lives were in many ways modelled after Islam. More recently, numerous members of these groups have entered the fold of Muslim orthodoxy.

Today there are about five million Muslims in America.

How does Islam guarantee human rights ?

Freedom of conscience is laid down by the Quran itself: 'There is no compulsion in religion'. (2.256)

The life and property of all citizens in an Islamic state are considered sacred whether a person is Muslim or not.

Racism is incomprehensible to Muslims, for the Quran speaks of human equality in the following terms:

'O mankind! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honored of you in God 's sight is the greatest of you in piety. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware'. (49.13)

What is the makeup of The Muslim World?

The Muslim population of the world is around one billion. Most Muslims live east of Karachi. 30% of Muslims live in the Indian subcontinent, 20 % in Sub-Saharan Africa, 17% in Southeast Asia, 18% in the Arab world, 10% in the Soviet Union and China. Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan comprise 10% of the non-Arab Middle East. Although there are Muslim minonties in almost everv area including Latin America and Australia, they are most numerous in the Soviet Union, India, and central Afnca. There are 5 million Muslims in the United States.

Conclusion

The Islamic world remains today a vast land stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with an important presence in Europe and America, animated by the teachings of Islam and seeking to assert its own identity. Despite the presence of nationalism and various secular ideologies in their midst, Muslims wish to live in the modern world but without simply imitating blindly the ways followed by the West. The Islamic world wishes to live at peace with the West as well as the East but at the same time not to be dominated by them. It wishes to devote its resources and energies to building a better life for its people on the basis of the teachings of Islam and not to squander its resources in either internal or external conflicts. It seeks finally to create better understanding with the West and to be better understood by the West. The destinies of the Islamic world and the West cannot be totally separated and therefore it is only in understanding each other better that they can serve their own people more successfully and also contribute to a better life for the whole of humanity.